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SUBJECT: NAGA INSURGENCY OFFERS NO EASY SOLUTION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: December 4-7, ConGen met with government officials and contacts in the Northeast Indian state of Nagaland to discuss ongoing ethnic Naga insurgencies. During this period, representatives of the separatist National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) faction were meeting in Amsterdam with a GOI negotiating team led by Union Labor Minister George Fernandes to negotiate a formal peace treaty. A cease fire has been in place between the NSCN-IM and the GOI since August 1997. Contacts in Nagaland, from Chief Minister to social leaders, were uniform in hoping a resolution could be achieved through some form of autonomy or "federal relationship" under the Indian constitution. However, complicating this aspiration is the expectation that Naga dominated parts of neighboring states Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and even parts of Burma would have to be included in a final autonomous greater Nagaland or "Nagalim." End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Dec 4-7, ConGen met with Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio Governor Shyamal Datta, State Home Minister Thenucho, Chief Secretary Lalhuma, Indian Army 3rd Corps Commander Lieutenant General M.S. Dadwal and Leader of the Opposition, Congress Party Member I. Imkong. Discussions focused on prospects of meeting the demands by insurgent NSCN-IM and the NSCN-Khaplang factions for Naga autonomy. The GOI has ceasefires with both groups but is only conducting negotiations with NSCN-IM. None of the contacts could offer much detail on the negotiations that were occurring at that time in Amsterdam between the GOI team led by Union Labor Minister George Fernandes and NSCN-IM leaders Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muviah. The CM indicated that the Central GOI did not consult regularly with the state leadership on terms or aspects of its negotiations with the separatists. The lack of discussion between the state and federal officials was a common complaint of the state officials and contributed to a sense of alienation at the state-level from the national government.

¶3. (SBU) While specifics were lacking, the state officials believed that a growing understanding was developing between the GOI and the insurgents that would lead to resolving what is considered to be one of the longest running insurgencies in South Asia. The GOI will not accept the insurgents' initial demands for an independent "Nagalim," incorporating the 1.2 million Nagas resident in Nagaland and the surrounding states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. However, some form of autonomy under the terms of India's existing constitution, "a sub-national constitution," might be possible, but the area of

the autonomous district might not include the Naga areas of the surrounding states. What autonomy would mean is not clear but would likely allow for more Naga control over budget, natural and mineral resources, education and curriculum. The GOI would still control security, external relations and monetary policies.

¶4. (SBU) CM Rio believed that the incorporation of all Naga territories would be necessary for a successful peace agreement. Other officials, including Opposition Leader Imkong agreed, saying that a greater Nagaland was critical point for the NSCN-IM leadership as other insurgent groups such as the NSCN-K and Naga National Council (NNC) would accuse the NSCN-IM of 'selling-out' to the GOI. A possible middle solution was for the GOI to provide a degree of autonomy for the state of Nagaland, leaving the door open for later incorporation of other areas. Although, this may not be politically tenable for the present Congress-led Indian government coalition as the neighboring states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh all have Congress-led governments that would likely collapse if state land were ceded to a greater Nagaland. CM Rio's refusal to recognize the practical and political limitations of ceding land from neighboring states for Nagaland was not unique as many of the local officials argued a final agreement would not be possible unless all Nagas were incorporated into an autonomous Nagaland. Rio's blindness to political realities also extended to his belief that the GOI should pressure the Government of Burma to cede Naga dominated territory in Burma. Approximately 500,000 Nagas live in Burma and constitute much of the base for the NSCN-K faction.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: A striking aspect of the various interactions with leading government officials, both elected leaders and civil servants, was the almost uniform support for a

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greater Nagalim. Surprisingly, state officials sworn to uphold a unified India were very open in advocating for an autonomous Nagaland. The two GOI appointed officials met by ConGen, Indian Army 3rd Corps Commander Dadwal and Governor Datta, offered a contrary view and, unlike the state leadership, saw the separatists as a security problem for India. The pro-autonomy position of state officials and the sense that the GOI seldom consulted on the peace negotiations conveyed an impression of significant disconnect between the GOI and Nagaland. With no clear results from the last round of negotiations in Amsterdam, immediate resolution of the Naga problem is unlikely and the sense of separation and isolation of Nagaland from India will likely continue as local officials advocate more vocally for autonomy.

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